

Romania's Road to NATO: A Necessary Process that has Implied Doctrinal, Structural, and Social Issues

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Romania's road to NATO, a necessary process in its efforts to a westward orientation, has not been an easy process. This process has implied doctrinal, structural, and social issues. The 1989 Revolution brought Romanian society into an era of democracy. However, democracy does not exclude the need for security. Once the Warsaw Pact dissolved, Romania did not find itself as a member of any security alliance. For Romania, joining NATO would mean a permanent breakout from Russian influences. This independence would prove Romanian efforts to build a democratic society to the entire world. Romania understands that it needs to show that it can be a stabilizing factor in the region. Becoming a Partnership for Peace (PfP) member, Romania has shown that while it is eager for security, it can also become a security provider. However, the struggling economy and immature political system has made Romania's road toward NATO a painful process, which has implied doctrinal, structural and social issues.

The Romanian national defense strategy, prior to 1989, clearly stated that the entire military effort concentrated on the defense of the homeland. The 1989 Revolution opened the gate to the Romanian people and showed a new world governed by democratic rules. Because all activities in a society are based on rules and laws,

Romania has established a new constitution from which the fundamental laws of the state are derived. For military personnel, the Military Strategy of Romania is a document comprising new concepts in the Romanian military. With this document, the Ministry of National Defense set forth the strategic purpose of the National Security Strategy and the provisions of the Defense White Book of the Government. This document is the cornerstone of all activities in the Armed Forces. The Military Strategy of Romania was developed upon the following basis: Romania has no stated enemies; it enjoys peaceful relations with its neighbors and an emerging major military short and medium term threat to security it's less likely. The essence of the strategy includes four main concepts: credible defensive capability, restructuring and modernization, enhanced and more operational partnership, and gradual integration. All four concepts support the national effort to become a member of the democratic "family". Furthermore, this document gave the Armed Forces necessary guidance for a combat training process and the guidance to build a new military ready to face the challenges of the society and the international environment.

Although establishing new doctrine was not challenging for Romania, bigger problems appeared when it

faced the necessity for the reorganization of the Armed Forces. Immediately after 1990, the entire nation faced large economic problems. An economic environment based on free market rules was the goal for the nation, in an effort to build a democratic society. This was difficult to do, considering the communist regime built large factories (some of them numbering around 40,000 workers) and private property ownership was only possible for people who lived in the Alpine regions. The Armed Forces had to find a way to adapt to the needs of the nation. In a press conference in May of 2001, the Chief of the Romanian General Staff affirmed: "*Romania would not be able to defend itself with 500,000 men and its security involves a lot of aspects. With armed forces at the level it used to have or at this level Romania will not be able to defend itself alone. A strong army translates into proper equipment and highly trained men, from soldier to general, and a clear idea on what its missions are.*" Since Romania no longer needed a large military structure, the process of building a small, credible, and highly proficient Military Forces began. "*Project Force 2005*" functionally comprises operational, territorial and reserve forces. As far as readiness is concerned, the armed forces include: Surveillance and Early

Warning Forces, Crisis Situations Response Forces, Main Forces and Reserve Forces<sup>1</sup>.

The need for interoperability between Romania and other nations' armed forces is another challenge that implies changes in Romanian weaponry, surveillance, target acquisition, communication systems, and command and control structure. Because this is not an easy and cheap process, it is necessary to achieve a balance in the Romanian armed forces. First, priority units need to maintain a high level of readiness, while most of the forces necessary for war will have a reduced and variable readiness. Romania's free market economy allowed its leaders find the money to put together the nucleus of a future force able to perform missions in the international environment.

Many in the Romanian military claim that the reorganization of the Armed forces was not the best way to accomplish the proposed goals. However, determining the size of the force, then the personnel and equipment needed to furnish this institution is the preferable solution for Romania, considering the economic environment and the funds available.

Building a new military structure implies not only organizational matters, but social problems as well. The

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<sup>1</sup> Structural Organization of Project Force 2005- Military Strategy of Romania.

year 1990 found the Romanian military numbering about 150,000 people. The target established for Project Force 2005 is approximately 80,000 military and 20,000 civilian personnel<sup>2</sup>. Many social issues have surfaced. The majority of Romanian military personnel have received only a military education. Now they must be disseminated into a civilian society wrought with economic problems. Social protection measures have taken place in support of those who can no longer work in the military. For example, in FY 2001, 4,416 military personnel and 2,000 civilians faced this problem<sup>3</sup>. They received financial compensation, which helped them integrate into civilian society. Another issue to take in account is the number of the officers in the military. Before 1989, the Romanian Armed Forces were officer based, typical of the Warsaw Pact. Officers did everything from training to planning. Officers were platoon commanders to chiefs of staff. Following the western Armed Forces example in the new structure, officers have a planning role, making scenarios, planning combat training, or commanding in battle, while all other activities are performed by NCOs. The direct result is that the majority of military personnel required to retired early are

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<sup>2</sup> Structural Organization of Force Project 2005- Military Strategy of Romania

<sup>3</sup> Land Forces Magazine (#3/2001)- Present and future for Romanian Armed Forces –by col Vasile Baetelu

officers. Besides social protection measures, the Romanian Ministry of Defense has tried to find different methods for professional reconversion. One solution is to equate military education with different civilian degrees. This solution often worked but some officers did not have access to various assignments, which limited their experience in some areas.

Following the same idea of making officers a planning element more than an execution element, the new organization has more NCO assignments. This created a new problem: the need for qualified, capable NCOs ready to train the troops. During a press conference in May of 2001, the Chief of the General Staff affirmed that Romania needs another 10 years to prepare the necessary NCO corps. The NCO schools brought instructors from English speaking nations to help prepare NCOs. One example is the Military School for NCOs from Pitesti<sup>4</sup> which has instructors from the United State Marine Corps. The proficiency level of the graduates demonstrated that it is a good solution for obtaining well trained NCOs.

The main challenge for those who still work in the military and for those who faced retirement was to change mentality. Before 1990, many officers and NCOs graduated

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<sup>4</sup> A medium sized town in the Southern part of Romania



from military schools and worked in the same unit their entire career, changing only their assignments. Another preconceived idea was that one served their entire life in the military and retired with a pension. Many of those who were forced into early retirement, felt, although they received compensatory payments and all other rights derived from Law 80/1992<sup>5</sup>, they were unfairly discharged. Those who were able to adapt their capabilities found the transition to a civilian job easier. For those who are still working in the military, the problems are more complex, and commanders must accomplish the mission working with the new table of organization, in many cases, with old equipment (which requires larger crews)<sup>6</sup>.

So, in order to join NATO Romania has faced doctrinal, structural, and social issues. It is the situation of a country that was under communist regime 20 years and decides that now it's the time to establish its own place into a world of democracy and friendship. During the May 2001 press conference, the Chief of General Staff affirmed: " *Joining NATO or not, is rather political issue. From the military point of view, we are trying to get ready for membership. NATO embodies the democratic values Romania*

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<sup>5</sup> Law 80/1992- the law that provide the activity for military personnel in Romanian Armed Forces.

<sup>6</sup> Romania rolls a long term procurement program 2010-2015.

*aspires to. We wish to join in NATO but not for fear that will be attacked in a more or less foreseeable future. This is not what pushes us towards NATO, but the wish of more than 85 per cent of our population that aspires to the democratic values NATO defends... this is in fact the political option of this country and the military will follow."* The national will to join NATO drove political and military leaders to find the best way to build, reorganize, and create a new Armed Force, capable of providing a "credible defensive capability"<sup>7</sup>. Now that Romania has received the official invitation to join NATO<sup>8</sup>, it still has a long way to go. With that first step complete, Romania has to prove itself a member of the European Community (to which Romania has substantially contributed throughout its history). As Romania struggles ahead, it learns, as the former Prime Minister, Mr. Mugur Isarescu very well few lessons: "constructive relations with our neighbors, not being part of the problem is important; trying to be part of the solution is essential...developing team spirit"<sup>9</sup>. It has not been easy, but it is necessary and has to be done.

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<sup>7</sup> Military Strategy of Romania.

<sup>8</sup> NATO Summit- Prague , November 2002.

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